

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
2 February 1983

East of the Urals

In Tokyo earlier this week, Secretary of State George Shultz reassured Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone that the U.S. won't sacrifice Asian security interests in the Geneva negotiations on medium-range missiles. We hope the U.S. stands by the promise implied here that it won't consider the Soviet proposal to transfer some of its European SS-20 force east of the Urals, as an alternative to total dismantlement.

Wishful thinkers in Western Europe and the U.S. have somehow seen the Siberia and Central Asia option as a peaceful gesture, even though SS-20s are mobile and moving them eastward would therefore make Europe no less vulnerable to the threat of Soviet nuclear attack. In addition, the possibility of deploying additional missiles on Asian soil is part of an accelerating Soviet campaign to intimidate Asian countries, particularly Japan. The goal is to frighten the Japanese into neutrality, or at least into not taking greater responsibility for the defense of the Free World.

The Japanese feel vulnerable. The Soviets have already stationed roughly 100 SS-20s in Asia, and Japan is within the range of all of them. In recent years, according to the Japanese Defense Agency, Soviet warplanes have been making an annual average of 240 flights just outside Japanese airspace. Soviet ships have been harassing Japanese fishing vessels near the Japanese island of Hokkaido. And the Soviets have moved the equivalent of a division—including tanks, artillery, armored personnel carriers, anti-aircraft missiles and helicopters—and reportedly modern MiG-21 aircraft into the Kurile Islands north of Hokkaido; since Japan regards the Kuriles as its own territory, the Soviet buildup there is intended as a dramatic demonstration of Japanese powerlessness before Soviet might.

However, the Soviet bullying tactics may well be backfiring, especially under the new regime of Prime Minister Nakasone. Last week, in a remarkable statement to the Soviet ambassador in Tokyo, Japan's Deputy Foreign Minister Toshiji Nakajima called the trans-Ural missile proposal "unacceptable." He also protested recent suggestions in the Soviet press that Japan might become the target of a nuclear attack if it continued to move toward closer economic and military cooperation with South Korea.

tions "a wanton attempt to fan anxiety among the Japanese people."

It would be tempting to say that Western Europeans, particularly the Germans, should take a lesson from the Japanese in standing up to Soviet pressure tactics. But at least so far, there is more bluff than substance to the Japanese response. Japan does not even remotely seem to be considering stationing missiles on its own territory that would be a deterrent to the Asian SS-20s. It has therefore not had to contend with German- or British- or Dutch-style "peace movements" that somehow consider Pershings but not SS-20s a threat to peace. Despite all the rhetoric of self-sufficiency when it comes to such questions as rice imports, the Japanese have been even more content than the Europeans to rely on a U.S. nuclear umbrella.

But the Japanese government is now struggling with an important decision which will take political courage. The U.S. has been asking Japan to take responsibility for controlling the Straits of Soya, Tsugaru and Tsushima, with the aim of being able to bottle up the Soviet fleet in the Sea of Japan or alternatively keep it out of its home port of Vladivostok in the event of hostilities. Japanese assumption of this responsibility would enable U.S. naval forces to devote more attention to other trouble spots, particularly the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. But the task would require considerable air cover, much more than Japan is currently able to provide, and it would presumably expose Japanese air bases to Soviet attack if the Soviets believed passage through the three straits was strategically essential.

The recent tempest about whether Mr. Nakasone did or didn't say he wanted to build Japan into an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" is a foreshadowing of the political turmoil that will accompany debate on this subject.

The negotiations in Geneva therefore cannot be considered from the viewpoint of Europe alone. If Japan is to take on greater defense responsibilities—and presumably greater defense risks—it must have confidence that the U.S. won't sacrifice Japan's interests in nuclear policy. And any agreement that would increase the vulnerability of our Asian friends to Soviet intimidation would be no arms